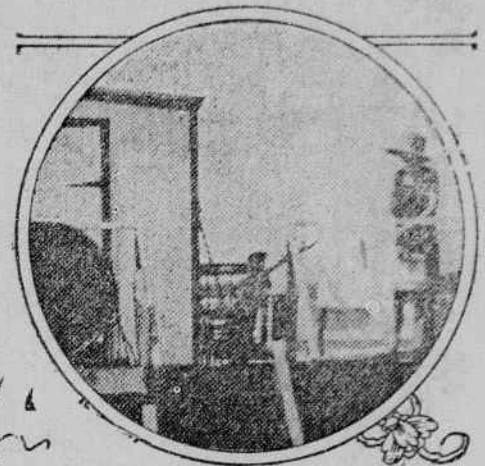
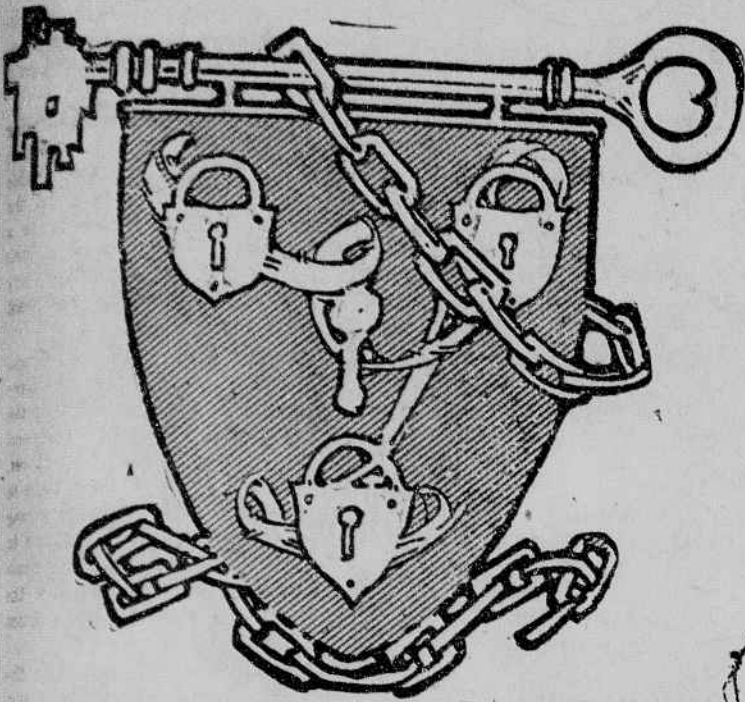


# COMMUNITY BATHING SUITS SPOIL NEW DAWN

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The Nunnery of Chimneysweep Islands

## Taint of Private Property Splits Pelham Bay Soviet Wide Open. Proletariat Too Literal in Its Conception of Communal Ownership

OVER the sun-flecked waters of Pelham Bay the fall of the hammer and the drone of the saw now echo where before were hard words and more hard words. The revolution is ended on Chimneysweep Islands, and the revolutionists have been condemned to exile—in Manhattan.

While the edifices of private property grow and blossom on Chimneysweep, those who a short time ago tried to make a communist colony out of this little pile of rocks off the shore of the Bronx are cursing their fate in Greenwich Village dens and writing about it to the newspapers. And that's that, as the Wild Irish Rose puts it.

Chimneysweep Islands to-day is a summer colony of assorted persons, mostly of the writing persuasion—a colony which, though cooperatively owned, is strongly tainted with private property. But Chimneysweep Islands only a short time ago was the setting for an impromptu experiment that was to have weighty and far-reaching consequences. As a matter of fact, it did have, though not of the sort the experimenters intended.

The "low-down" of the Battle of Chimneysweep is a tale to gladden the heart and delight the risibles. It is a tale of wild "Wobblies" and leaky bedquits, of community bathing suits and of a breadknife that simply could not be divided up. It is a tale of communists who were too communistic and of parlor Bolsheviks who, goaded to the point beyond which not even a parlor Bolshevik can be safely goaded, reverted to the beliefs of their fathers and won the Battle of Chimneysweep with hard cash. It is a tale of padlocks and busted faiths and joy.

Chimneysweep, in case you haven't heard of it, is located out in Pelham Bay, an hour by subway, half an hour by bus, and half an hour more by rowboat from any point from which you may start out. Pedantically speaking, there are two islands, but the second one is so small and so precipitously conical that none but lovers desperate for solitude in an overcrowded bay ever land there. The islanders call it the Elephant's Back, and whenever one of the literary members talks too persistently about the Great American Novel, he is threatened with isolation on that rocky peak, but this has never yet been put into effect.

There is scenery whichever way you look from Chimneysweep. To the northeast is the full sweep of Long Island Sound, studded with white sails and furrowed toward evening by the majestic passage of the Boston boats. Manhattanward are more islands, including Hart's Island and the potter's field, where, according to the Chimneysweepers, the potters putter about on windy nights. And in some other directions—the reporter is mixed up by this time—lies Pelham Bay, where all of the Bronx rides on Sunday in rowboat, catboat, launch and canoe.

As the tale goes, it was the Wild Irish Rose who first discovered Chimneysweep a summer ago. Formerly a sort of maritime roadhouse and fisherman's haven, since Volstead days the little island had been deserted except for exploring boaters who peered through the cobwebby windows of the Baracks and the Nunnery and the Main.

To the Wild Irish Rose, a husky, hospitable soul who heaves family furnishings into and out of a warehouse near Ninth Avenue. Chimneysweep was caviar. He immediately looked up the owner of the island and secured it for the summer. That detail attended to, he threw open the musty doors of Chimneysweep to the world and invited

it to come in and be communistic about the rent.

And the world came. All the Rose's friends were there the first Sunday after the invitation, and they brought their friends, and the friends' friends brought their friends. Within a few weeks the island housed a flourishing colony of sailors without ships, poets without cash, radicals of all descriptions and a contingent of grubby persons who had regular jobs in town and who came there for the week ends.

From the beginning, however, there was a sharp though at that time not obvious division in the recruits. Some of them were real communists; prominent I. W. W.'s, hardened freight riders, professional proletarians, who rowed up to the island in phalanxes singing "Hallelujah, I'm a bum!" The others were parlor Bolsheviks who, in spite of their political views, had savings accounts and relatives back home who were shocked at "the life" they were leading.

Chimneysweep was run on principles of simon-pure communism—so simon-pure, in fact, that they have rarely been subjected to the harsh test of reality. The noble souls who congregated there were way beyond the doctrine of equal pay, equal work and equal benefits. You paid what you felt like, on Chimneysweep, and if you didn't feel that way you didn't pay anything. You brought what you liked to the community dining table, ate as much of what other people brought as you wanted, and washed no dishes that could possibly be avoided. You dragged your cot where you chose and took what bedding you could get. First comers grabbed the Wild Irish Rose's famous "brass blankets" (from the warehouse), later comers took the quilts that leaked cotton all over the place, and last comers rolled up in overcoats—anybody's overcoat.

So Chimneysweep started on its perilous way as a haven for the temperamental.

Architecturally the little island is admirably adapted for a feud. The Main, which includes large living room, kitchen and porches, is separated from the Nunnery by a combination sidewalk and pier. All the sidewalks on Chimneysweep have to be piers on occasion, for the northeasters roll up high tides every now and then. On the off side of the Nunnery is the flat rock where suppers and black looks used to be toasted simultaneously during the course of the battle. Beyond this is the Baracks, a onetime bathhouse made into cell-like sleeping apartments, where various of the combatants used to rush at times to "get away from it all."

It was the finances, of course, which caused the first rift. Unable to escape from their bourgeois bringing up, the parlor Bolsheviks dived heavily into the savings accounts, and

the result was that before long the communists had the numbers and the p. B.'s had the rent receipts. This was unfortunate. It enabled the p. B.'s to give themselves airs and if there is anything that a communist does not like it is airs.

At the outset of the season the p. B.'s, with the aid of the rent receipts, took possession of the Nunnery. It was not called the Nunnery then, but this derisive term was later bestowed on it by the communists because the p. B.'s used sheets.

The communists fortified themselves in the Main, cluttered up the dining room with cots and the kitchen with dirty dishes, and in other ways made themselves thoroughly at home.

With this line-up it took very little to start hostilities, and the extra bathing suits did it. These suits belonged to the p. B.'s, who cannily kept one suit for swimming and a dry one to put on when they came out of the water. The communists thought one bathing suit to a person was enough and said so frankly. Especially when there were others who had none. When the subject was discussed the p. B.'s put on their "I-am-paying-for-this" expression and a few of the airs.

So one day, when one of the communists tried to commandeer the Cornflake's other bathing suit she snatched it out of his hands and calmly walked off with it to the Nunnery.

The next week end there was a nice new padlock on the front door of the Nunnery, and the week after that, when the p. B.'s arrived, they found that the back door of their headquarters had been pried bodily loose by removing the hinges and that the sacred bathing suits were still suspiciously damp.

There were words that evening over the supper table, and with the next meal the p. B.'s seceded from the common dining room and ate in the Nunnery. They still used the kitchen from necessity, but they brought into it chops and lettuce and all such alien substances where before there had been naught but canned beans and mulligan stew. There are few objects which a communist regards with more scorn than lettuce.

When the p. B.'s left the dining room they carried off with them a supply of china and all the so-called silver which was not rusty, this by grace of the rent receipts again. It was not a kindly deed, but it was natural when you consider that the communists washed dishes by letting the tide run over them, and then only when there were no more

Poets of various sorts rhapsodize in parody over the after-dinner cigarettes, in which ladies also indulge. Cartoonists trip about over the clam shells, artists blister their necks on the sun-baked rocks and editors of various sorts snooze comfortably on the shaded porch. Bloomers bloom

dishes to use. In retaliation the communists left their unmade beds standing around in the living room all day so that the p. B.'s couldn't sit there at all.

All this time there were words, and looks and upturned noses and scornful, hooting laughs. The Main was uninhabitable, what with the beds and the dishes and various barefooted Wobblies sitting round and telling what they would make the p. B.'s do when the proletariat came into power. And the p. B.'s put on more airs.

Then another bomb burst. One of the communists whom the p. B.'s had contemptuously ignored as a windbag, wrote up the island for a certain New York City daily as a "haunted soviet." He pictured it as a summer headquarters for the I. W. W. and for radicals of every description, telling how they made pilgrimages there from all parts of the country, described the "soviet" on the island, and ended by declaring that 100 per cent American ghosts from the potter's field came over and haunted the Chimneysweepers. There was not a word of the p. B.'s, not a suggestion of rent receipts, not a hint of the feud.

At this affront the blood of the p. B.'s boiled and boiled. They gathered in the Nunnery and composed a scathing answer to the story, saying that if the communists saw ghosts it was because they brought something over with them on the hip. The counter attack never saw print, and the p. B.'s boiled to the point of explosion.

Now, one of the marvelous things about

publicity is that sometimes what was not true at the time of writing becomes a fact afterward. The "haunted soviet" story drew more communists, more Wobblies, more persecuted martyrs. A whole class from the Rand School came out to view the new radical headquarters. After them came a detective who investigated everybody, including the parlor Bolsheviks. People flocked there in increasing numbers, and denser and denser grew the Main.

In helpless rage the p. B.'s seceded even from the kitchen. They built fires on the rock near the Nunnery and cooked their meals outdoors, with loud laughter and much display of lettuce. They invited friends to the al fresco meals and did not invite the communists. The latter, left to themselves, with no "bourgeois" around to torment, no sheets, no chops, nothing, sat on the porch with crestfallen faces and looked at the merry groups around the campfire.

The envious looks were not lost on the parlor Bolsheviks. It was the first sign of wavering in the ranks of the foe, and the p. B.'s were fired with a passion for blood.

According to the tale told by those who lived through these trying days, the factor which finally ended the battle was a breadknife. It was not a gorgeous article, such as the heroine stabs the wicked baron with in the opera, but a rusty affair, half knife and half saw. Such as it was, the p. B.'s carried it off to the Nunnery, murmuring to themselves: "We paid for this." When the p. B.'s were in swimming the communists would steal over to the Nunnery and retrieve the breadknife.

That meant one of the p. B.'s would have to

pay a return visit to the chaotic Main, fly a flag of truce, dicker, promise to return the breadknife, and, of course, not do it. Then the whole thing would have to be done all over again.

The remedy which the p. B.'s finally applied was out of all proportion to the breadknife episodes, but no one viewing the island to-day can deny that it was effective. Strewn around their bonfire one day on the rock, they decided to BUY the island. Buy it right out from under the communists' feet, darn them! Fix it up, run them off, have a whole kitchen to themselves. They dived more heavily into the savings accounts.

To-day Chimneysweep Islands, Inc., stands in the name of nine persons, each of whom is a strong believer in private property. There are no communists, and the only Wobbly left is a combination steward, carpenter and caretaker whom the p. B.'s took over for his wizardry with the hammer and the skillet. Guests are permitted only upon invitation and are soaked a dollar each, besides. "Working reporters" are de trop.

While the triumphant owners are in the city adding to the savings accounts, the carpenter-steward wields the hammer and the saw all day rehabilitating the buildings and adding all those little touches which the communists so despised. Padlocks decorate the doors of all the renovated and scrupulously neat bedrooms. Private property is all over the place—canoes, carpets, clam rakes—everything. Sweaters and bathing suits are safe and even liable to be returned to the owner. Everything may be left unguarded except cigarettes.

As for the Main, onetime headquarters of the revolution, it is transformed. White curtains fly from the windows. White paint glistens on the walls and the furniture, which does not include cots. And around a long white painted table the communists sit down to lettuce and beefsteak and afterward sing songs in English, French, German, Latin and Chinese.

Not that Chimneysweep has become colorless in its reversion to law and order. It still savors somewhat of Bohemia. The Great American Novel is carried around in the pockets and brief cases of half a dozen of the owners and visitors. Poets of various sorts rhapsodize in parody over the after-dinner cigarettes, in which ladies also indulge. Cartoonists trip about over the clam shells, artists blister their necks on the sun-baked rocks and editors of various sorts snooze comfortably on the shaded porch. Bloomers bloom.

All is indeed serene on Chimneysweep, and the little island has changed its emblem from the red flag to a padlock.

